

The Sandhills

The Sandhills region is characterized by a series of flat-topped, sandy ridges and relatively broad, flat valleys. This landscape is the result of large quantities of clay, sand and gravel being transported by streams and rivers flowing eastward from the Piedmont. These materials were deposited as sediment in and along the margin of an ancient sea that covered much of the region millions of years ago. After the sea retreated eastward, weather and erosion shaped the landscape into the ridges and valleys seen today.

History Highlights

In the mid-1700s, when Scottish Highlanders settled in the Sandhills region, the vast forest consisted of original growth longleaf pines that reached heights of 100 to 120 feet. Merchants cut the forests for timber and cultivated choice stands for use as masts for the Royal Navy ships. By 1800, North Carolina's pine forests were producing one-third of the world's supply of turpentine. Resin collected from elongated, inverted V-shaped cuts in the tree trunks was distilled into turpentine and rosin. Dead limbs and logs were buried in earthen kilns and burned slowly to produce tar and pitch. All of these products were used for sealing the hulls, decks, masts and riggings of sailing vessels, and thus became known as naval stores.

When railroads arrived in the Sandhills in the 1870s, large-scale logging and lumbering began. As a result of logging and naval stores operations, most of the virgin growth of longleaf pines had disappeared from the Sandhills by 1900. Many of the older trees that survive today bear prominent scars of this human exploitation.

Early in the 20th century, the grandfather of James Boyd, a well-known North Carolina author, purchased a substantial tract of land east of Southern Pines to save the longleaf pines from logging. He named the estate Weymouth because the pines reminded him of trees in Weymouth, England. In April 1963, Boyd's widow, Katharine, donated 403 acres of land to the state, establishing the first natural area in the North Carolina state parks system. Additional land has been acquired, including a satellite area added in 1977 known as the Boyd Round Timber Tract. The term "round timber" is a colloquial expression that describes old growth trees that were not cut for lumber or naval stores. The Boyd tract contains a sizeable stand of old-growth longleaf pines aging from 250 to more than 450 years old.

Natural Areas

Natural areas became a part of the state parks system when Weymouth Woods was established in 1963. These areas, more suitable for education and conservation than recreation, are set aside in their natural state. The purpose of natural areas is to preserve and protect lands of outstanding scientific and scenic value for the enrichment of present and future generations. Environmental education and conservation research are important roles of all state natural areas. Of the 18 natural areas in the North Carolina state park system, Weymouth Woods is one of two areas with staff and visitor facilities.



Nature's Classroom

Weymouth Woods has an abundance of learning opportunities for everyone to experience. Explore our nature museum and discovery room. Join us for a Sunday afternoon nature program. Watch hummingbirds being banded for research. Schedule a program specially tailored for your group or class. The possibilities of what you can learn are endless.



Longleaf Pine

In spite of urban development nearby, the forests of Weymouth Woods seem remote. As in other parts of the Sandhills, longleaf pines form the dominant plant community. Their shiny needles, which grow up to 18 inches long, produce a canopy of sparkling green atop massive, straight trunks. In the spring, small purplish male cones appear in clusters at the ends of branches and dust the woodlands with yellow pollen before dropping to the ground. The female cones measure 6 to 10 inches in length at maturity and remain on the tree for nearly two years before releasing their seeds.

Prescribed Burning: Longleaf pine forests are plant communities adapted to periodic burning, and their survival depends upon fire. The original forests were maintained by natural fires that usually were caused by lightning. As settlement and land development increased, the longleaf forests became increasingly fragmented. This fragmentation, coupled with fire-fighting practices of the 20th century, prohibited natural fires from running their course. As a result, competing plant species thrived and inhibited longleaf regeneration. The small old-growth forest on the Boyd tract and scattered old longleaf pines elsewhere at Weymouth Woods are a mere vestige of the vast forests that once covered the region. Where fire has been excluded, hardwoods have encroached beneath the pines and now threaten the pines' survival.

Prescribed fires, which simulate natural fires, are periodically set at the preserve in order to maintain the longleaf pine community. These fires remove or control competing hardwoods, provide open areas where longleaf seedlings can germinate and grow, and return nutrients to the soil. Prescribed burning also benefits the many native animals and groundcover plants that are a part of the longleaf ecosystem.

Flora & Fauna

Plant Life

The early settlers who named the Sandhills region the "pine barrens" must not have appreciated the diversity of plant life carpeting the land. The extensive open forests of longleaf pines may have appeared monotonous, but this region is anything but barren! Over 1,000 species have been found in the Sandhills region, and more than 500 species are present at Weymouth Woods. On sandy slopes and ridges, turkey and blackjack oaks grow along with wiregrass and longleaf pines. These give way in the bottomlands and swamp thickets to various hardwoods, including dogwood, red and white oak, American holly, sourwood, black titi, bay, gum, hickory, yellow poplar, persimmon and red maple. Conifers such as loblolly and pond pines are also present.

A rich diversity of plants ranging from mosses and ferns to grasses, wildflowers and woody shrubs nestles beneath the forest canopy. From February to November look for some of these sandhill specialties: sandhills pyxie moss, bog spicebush, ashy wild indigo, spreading lupine, sandhills sandwort, rosy spiderwort, queens root, meadow beauty, sandhills lily, pine barren gentian and numerous orchids and asters. Though not truly plants, an abundance of lichens and mushrooms also blanket the understory.

Animal Life

Many animals find shelter in Weymouth Woods. More than 160 species of birds make the preserve a birdwatcher's haven. Species associated with mature longleaf pine forests, including red-cockaded woodpeckers, pine warblers and brown-headed nuthatches are commonly seen during all seasons. During the spring and summer listen for Bachman's sparrows near the park office. A short hike in spring may also yield a few of the tropical visitors that nest here: summer tanager, prairie warbler, Kentucky warbler, blue grosbeak and great-crowned flycatcher.



Hiking Trails

Observe plant and animal life along more than 4.5 miles of hiking trails accessible from the visitor center. These easy, well-marked trails provide access to a variety of plant communities from dry sandy uplands to wet evergreen seeps called stream-head pocosin to small clear streams running through a hardwood swamp. A one-mile loop trail at the Boyd tract passes through an old growth forest of longleaf pines, some of which are more than 450 years old. The Paint Hill tract has two marked trails, a combined distance of approximately 1.5 miles. Check with park staff for information on access to the Boyd and Paint Hill tracts.

Slimy salamanders and many species of frogs and toads are amphibian residents. Reptiles you may find include non-venomous snakes such as the hognose snake, black racer, black rat snake and if you're lucky, a Northern pine snake. Fence lizards, green anoles, four types of skink and the speedy six-lined race-runner are frequently encountered.

Insects abound in the Sandhills. Harvester ants and several other ant species form conspicuous mounds. Velvet ants, which are really wasps that resembled ants, are readily found with their stunning black and red bands, and should be avoided as they can inflict a painful sting. Nearly 100 species of butterflies are present including several rare species: brown elfin, King's hairstreak, Edward's hairstreak, Meske's skipper and lace-winged roadside-skipper. Recent surveys have found well over 500 species of moths including several newly discovered species. Dragonflies and damselflies patrol all areas of the preserve.

Most of the mammals that live in Weymouth Woods are secretive or nocturnal, so they are seldom encountered. Fox squirrels, however, are occasionally seen scampering across trails. A larger relative of the gray squirrel, the fox squirrel has varying amounts of black, gray and red over its head, body and tail, and white accents on its nose and ear tips. The range of this mammal is more restricted than that of its cousin's, but the mature stands of longleaf are one of the fox squirrel's strongholds. The white-tailed deer is the largest mammal seen in the preserve. Other animals sometimes encountered include the raccoon, gray fox, bat, opossum, and cottontail rabbit.



Red-Cockaded Woodpecker

The red-cockaded woodpecker, which became an endangered species in 1970, is a native of the longleaf pine forest at Weymouth Woods. Unlike other woodpeckers that roost and nest in softer wood of dead trees, the red-cockaded woodpecker digs cavities in the heartwood of living, mature pine trees. Because this can be a lengthy process, red-cockaded woodpeckers live in clans of two to nine birds. The group usually consists of a breeding pair and its "helpers." The helpers, in addition to excavating new cavities, will assist in incubating eggs, searching for food and defending their colony of two to 12 trees.

Defending territory involves keeping away competitors such as southern flying squirrels, blue birds and other species of woodpeckers that attempt to use the red-cockaded woodpeckers' cavities for their own nests. Detering predators is also important, accomplished by chipping bark from around the entrance to induce the flow of resin. This creates a sticky barrier around the cavity, useful against tree-climbing predators such as rat snakes.

Natural History Museum

The visitor center houses a small natural history museum that focuses on the ecology of the sandhills. Exhibits depict the important role fire and the use of prescribed burning play in the sandhills longleaf pine forest, how plants and animals are adapted to fire, dioramas portraying burrowing, nocturnal animals and the use of longleaf pines in the naval stores industry. The museum is open 8 a.m. – 5 p.m., daily.

Rules & Regulations

Make your visit a safe and rewarding experience. Some of our regulations are posted for the protection of our visitors and our park. A complete list is available at the park office.

- ❑ The removal or disturbance of any plant, animal, artifact or mineral is prohibited.
- ❑ Throw trash in proper receptacles. State law requires aluminum cans and plastic bottles to be placed in recycling containers.
- ❑ Fires and fireworks are prohibited.
- ❑ Firearms and other weapons are prohibited except that those with a proper permit may possess a concealed handgun in permitted areas and under the requirements of North Carolina G.S. 14-415.11. All firearms and weapons are prohibited in visitor centers & park offices.
- ❑ The possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages is prohibited.
- ❑ North Carolina motor vehicle and traffic laws apply in the park.
- ❑ All North Carolina State Parks are wildlife preserves; hunting and trapping are not permitted.
- ❑ Pets must be on a leash no longer than six feet.
- ❑ Camping is not permitted.
- ❑ Vehicles and bicycles are not permitted on hiking trails.
- ❑ Horses are permitted on designated bridal trails only.

For Your Safety

To prevent accidents, please remember these safety tips.

- ❑ Boardwalks and bridges may be slippery when wet; exercise caution.
- ❑ Poison oak, ticks and venomous snakes may be found along park trails. Be alert.
- ❑ Hike on designated trails only. Do not take shortcuts or wade in streams.

Contact park staff for other safety tips or for an explanation of park rules.

The N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation is a division of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Dee Freeman Secretary  Beverly Eaves Perdue Governor

Welcome!

The Sandhills region consists of nearly one million acres in south-central North Carolina. In the midst of this sandy terrain famous for its golf courses, peach orchards and horse farms, is Weymouth Woods, a 900-acre nature preserve. As a natural area, Weymouth Woods is different from the traditional parks. This protected portion of our state's natural heritage serves to preserve and portray the natural features unique to the Sandhills region.

Unlike many parks, you won't find activities like camping or swimming at Weymouth Woods. Here, you'll find a much rarer opportunity – a chance to truly be a guest of the land in an area where you can escape among the longleaf pines. Where you can go hiking, birding, take photographs, and find solitude in nature. Where you can learn about rare and endangered species, like the red-cockaded woodpecker, the pine barrens tree frog and the bog spicebush.

Walk the sandy paths of Weymouth Woods. Look to the canopy of it stately trees. Listen to the sounds of its woodlands. Learn its many lessons. The fox squirrel, the longleaf pine and the role of fire are just a few of the subjects nature teaches in this fascinating ecosystem.



Park Hours

November–March 8 a.m.–6 p.m.
April–October 8 a.m.–8 p.m.

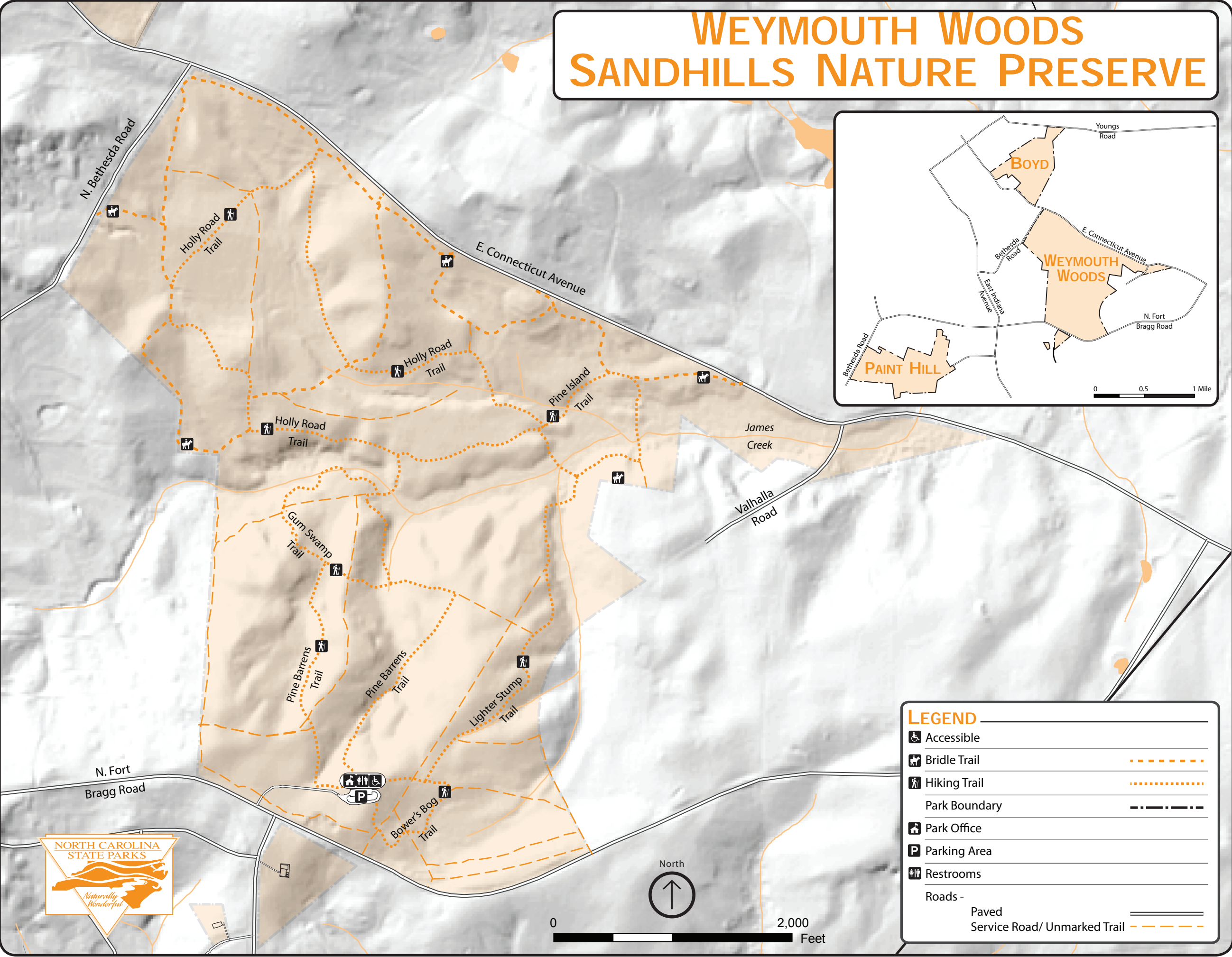
Contact Information

Weymouth Woods Sandhills Nature Preserve
1024 Fort Bragg Road
Southern Pines, NC 28387
(910) 692-2167
weymouth.woods@ncdenr.gov
www.ncparks.gov

N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation
Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources
1615 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1615
(919) 707-9300

When you have finished with this publication, help save our earth by sharing it with a friend, returning it to the park or recycling it.

WEYMOUTH WOODS SANDHILLS NATURE PRESERVE



WEYMOUTH WOODS SANDHILLS NATURE PRESERVE

WEYMOUTH WOODS SANDHILLS NATURE PRESERVE

Weymouth Woods Sandhills Nature Preserve is located in Moore County, one mile southeast of Southern Pines. Look for signs on U.S. 1 and N.C. 211.

THE APPROVED
NC
STATE PARKS
Naturally Wonderful
Pocket Ranger®

DOWNLOAD OUR APP
GET ALL OF
OUR MAPS!

Help preserve our parks print resources by going mobile!

We're social